

Summary Notes on the Distinguished Lecture:

“An Attempt to Measure the State of Social Justice in Egypt”

Monday 23 April, 2018, from 10:00 am to 12:00 noon

Speaker:

- Dr. Magued Osman, CEO and Director of the Egyptian Center for Public Opinion Research "Baseera"

Discussants:

- Ragui Assaad, Professor of Public Policy, University of Minnesota
- Dr. Mustafa Kamel El Sayed, Professor of Political Science at Cairo University and the American University in Cairo
- Dr. Hania Sholkamy, Assistant Professor, Social Research Center, American University in Cairo

Chair: Mr. Omar Mohanna, Chairman, Egyptian Center for Economic Studies

Moderator: Dr. Abla Abdel Latif, Executive Director and Director of Research, Egyptian Center for Economic Studies

The main points addressed in this DLS:

- Aiming to measure the state of social justice, this index is the first of its kind in Egypt. However, it needs further development to better reflect the reality of social justice in Egypt.
- According to the overall index, the index score of social justice in Egypt is 2.28, noting that the index ranges from 1 (best) to 10 (worst). The Index values are higher for certain indicators such as culture, participation, access to information and confidence in institutions.
- Social justice should not be reduced to the concept of economic justice only.
- Social justice is not limited to measures such as the distribution of low-priced goods to the poor. It is rather to provide equal opportunities for social mobility whereby any individual can rise to a higher economic or social status based on merit and without discrimination of any kind.
- Social justice does not necessarily require large resources but needs to prioritize spending and reallocate resources in accordance with these priorities. For example, the government

spent LE 500 million last year in additional subsidies for rationed goods in Ramadan, which could have been used as tuition fees for one third of a million poor children in kindergarten.

- The bill of Ramadan dried fruits and nuts (better known as "Yamish") in foreign currency equals about LE 500 million annually, which can be used to build 2500 classrooms per year to accommodate one hundred thousand students, who do not receive their fair share of education.
- The Egyptian Constitution includes 18 articles on social justice. Social justice is also a popular demand of the two revolutions of January 25th and June 30th, and there is political will to achieve it.
- According to the index, there are five gaps suffered by the Egyptian society, namely, the wealth gap, gender gap, spatial gap, generational gap, and physical gap. Social justice and the size of these gaps are measured by a set of indicators related to human capital (access to education, healthcare, culture, employment and information), and to social capital (equity, participation, satisfaction, and trust).
- ECES added three new dimensions of measurement to social and cultural capital, namely, debt (gross external debt as a percentage of GDP), research and development, and the environment. Also, a new variable was added to the health dimension, namely, actual per capita loadings of waste water. The Center also added various weights to the variables and recalculated the results of the index according in several scenarios, which revealed higher inequality.
- In FY 2018/2019 budget, debt service amounts to LE 541 billion, which is twice the wages budget, five times the education budget, and nine times the health budget for the same fiscal year.

The main points discussed in this DLS:

- Social justice should be coupled with economic growth when talking about sustainable development. The definition of social justice was widely debated during the drafting of the Egyptian Constitution of 2014. While non-economists thought it is limited to poverty alleviation, social justice includes many rights such as transparency, economic freedom, education and health.
- The index should be calculated periodically in order to provide a social justice observatory to be announced annually.

- The concept of social justice is changeable. Many politicians have tried to achieve social justice and paid a great price in return. Some succeeded, but many others failed.
- There is evidence that social injustice in Egypt is worsening due to the increasing shift towards capitalism.
- The goal of social justice is to achieve empowerment and to avail equal opportunities to citizens, something that is not happening in Egypt.
- It is difficult to measure non-theoretical assumptions regarding social justice.
- A transportation dimension should be added to the index.
- International comparisons are important to benchmark Egypt against the world in terms of social justice, especially that Egypt's ranking is always low in international indices.
- The economic dimension is not sufficiently represented in the index. Elements such as income, standard of living, access to basic services such as water, natural gas, energy, sanitation and housing should be added.
- Indicators of personal opinions that are not measurable often show the opposite of the truth. Some poor people have greater satisfaction and confidence because they have lower aspirations, unlike those with higher incomes who may have greater aspirations.
- One of the most important difficulties involved in preparing this index on a periodic basis is that many of the data sources on which the index is based are not issued periodically.
- It is necessary to rely on the Labor Force Survey, because it contains important data.
- The overall score of the index does not accurately reflect the reality of social justice in Egypt; the situation is actually worse, and therefore, the Center is working on improving and developing the index.